

absurdity when the officers of the Church treated sin as a means of filling her coffers, instead of regarding it as the great enemy with which she had for ever to contend. The confessional was similarly corrupted. The friars more especially, used it as a means of obtaining money for their orders. The two instruments of the sacrament of penance—the courts and the confessional—being notoriously corrupt, became at this period the centre of much discussion and more insult. Langland exposed and derided the practices of Summoners, Pardoners, and friar Confessors; but he believed in penance and absolution, he wished to recall the Church to her old path of duty, and so to bring the laity back to the pious obedience of ages that had gone by for ever.¹ Wycliffe was not content with Langland's proposal to return, which he saw to be impossible; he disbelieved the theory of absolution by penance, and he disliked Church jurisdiction over sin. Chaucer, untroubled by speculation, recorded what he saw, and what the man in the street said ; so he gibbeted the Summoner, who hangs in the sight of all to this day.

The father of English poetry had an eye for what was humorous. He describes an energetic Archdeacon in charge of a court:—

Whilom ther was dwelling in my countree
An Erchdeken, a man of heigh degree,
That boldely dide execucioun,
In punishing of fornicacion,
Of wicchecraft, and eek of bauderye,
Of diffamacion (slander) and avoutrye
(adultery),
Of chirche-reves and of testaments,
Of contractes, and of lakke of sacraments,
And eek of many another maner cryme,
Which nedeth nat rehersen at this tyme;
Of usure, and of symone" also.
But certes, lechours did he grettest **wo**.

; There were not wanting officials to
bring up offenders.

i The vilest of mankind made fortunes by preying
on the vices they were supposed to correct. The
Summoner corresponded to the blackmailer of
to-day, who lives on the scandalous

, ¹ &>. *PL*, C, *passus*, viii-ix; C, xvii. 28-42.